



Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



INSIDE:

RESPONDING TO CYCLONE MOCHA

A TRIP TO NICARAGUA

MEET A NEW PACIFIC PARTNER

"Before, being campesina meant being discriminated against. But now, I can shout with pride, 'I am a campesina!'"

– Rosibel, FEM co-founder

CYCLONE MOCHA RELIEF



Photos: Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK)

There are many human rights crises making headlines in the news these days. Every tragedy deserves attention and care, but some inevitably receive more than others.

One that might not have reached the forefront of your media — but that UUSC and our partners quickly and diligently addressed — took place in Burma this past spring.

Cyclone Mocha made landfall in Rakhine State, Burma, on May 14, breaking records as one of the most powerful cyclones ever recorded in the country. Striking in the midst of ongoing military violence, and in the

wake of lasting devastation from a genocide against the Rohingya, the storm impacted an estimated 3.4 million people and killed more than 400 people in Rakhine state alone.

Through our Emergency Response Fund, UUSC immediately provided our partners in the region with the funding they needed to distribute life-saving aid including shelter, medicine, food, and water.

Meanwhile, our partner Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK documented the factors that led to the hundreds of preventable deaths at the time of the storm.

They reported that the junta failed to provide warnings to the Rohingya to evacuate, making only “minimal efforts to relocate Rohingya internally displaced persons to safety.” These individuals — half of whom were children and all previously displaced by extreme violence — were effectively trapped while the storm made impact.

After leaving these communities in a vulnerable position, the junta continued to block international aid agencies (including the UN) from accessing impacted areas. Thankfully, affected groups were not completely out of help. UUSC’s unique partnerships with Burmese community organizations allowed us to deliver desperately needed aid to people on the ground.

As one of the few international organizations with access to the region, UUSC had the opportunity to respond immediately. While we typically budget projects ahead of time, thanks to the generous support of our members who contributed to our Emergency Response Fund, UUSC was ready to distribute emergency grants to our partners as soon as they called for our help.

Now, half of a year later, the road to recovery is far from over. Following the initial impacts of the storm, UUSC has since focused our efforts on building more robust disaster justice plans with our partners so that everyone can receive the assistance they need at the time that they need it.



VISITING UUSC'S PARTNER IN NICARAGUA

by Lindsey Hoemann

Earlier this year, I traveled to Nicaragua to visit UUSC's partner Fundación entre Mujeres (FEM). It was a full and vibrant five days of seeing just some of the transformational gender equity and systemic change work that FEM and its members are leading in their community of Estelí.

FEM is a feminist organization that promotes the strength, empowerment, and leadership of campesina (peasant farmer) women in rural Nicaragua. They do so in

many ways — from education and accompaniment to healthcare and food security — all while centering environmental justice and women's rights in everything they do.

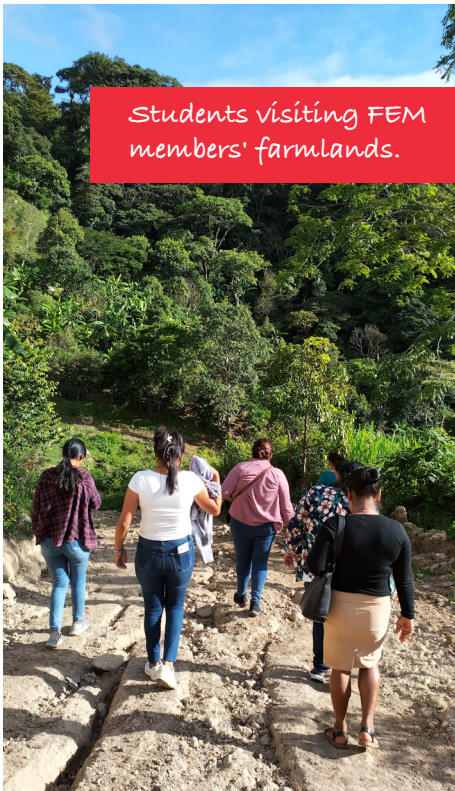
While there are not enough words to describe how incredible FEM is, I wanted to share a few highlights from each day of my trip. I hope this gives you a glimpse into FEM's daily work with the women in their communities, all of which is done with the generous support of UUSC's members.



Lindsey (second from right) with FEM's Council Members.

DAY 1

I met with FEM's Council and Founders, who gave me a tour and introduced me to their members. A large part of FEM's work involves educating women on organic farming so that they can gain control over what they eat, care for their land, and live farm-to-table. One of the women I met with grows her own turmeric, which she then uses in her broths and stews. Others harvest beets, tomatoes, squash, and onions. FEM's members call this the "sovereign plate" — meaning they don't need to purchase mass-produced foods when they can grow much of their sustenance themselves and help each other obtain locally-sourced foods.



DAY 2

With USC's financial support, FEM is helping young women attend university, and I met with several of these students during the visit. By encouraging young adults to pursue their learnings, FEM is helping campesinas become young professional women and use their academic background to contribute back to their local community. Students are studying everything from agroecology and English to nursing and social sciences.

DAY 3

I met with the Water Collection Brigade, a group of women who build custom-made water tanks and cisterns for people in the community who request running water. The cisterns — which take 10 days to build — are used by multiple households to water gardens, bathe, and for other needs around the home. Besides fulfilling tangible needs, these cisterns also increase the safety of women and children who would otherwise travel a far distance to access water.

Fani and her son next to the family water tank.



DAY 4

FEM runs an agroecology school, and I had the privilege of sitting in on one of their classes. The students gave me a warm welcome and passionately shared their motivations and experiences with me. During the class, students gave presentations on the care and cultivation of crops such as lettuce, squash, and zucchini.

DAY 5

On my last day, FEM emphasized the importance of building and maintaining the connection between the campesinas and the countryside. Migration to cities or to the U.S. has had a major impact on the community, but FEM is providing reasons for their community members to stay at home and feel safe, secure, and fulfilled. By living sustainably on their lands, FEM's members are defending their homes against large manufacturers who buy up abandoned land for corporate farming, which breaks down the fabric of the community and pollutes the air, land, and water supplies. FEM is helping create autonomy, keeping their communities more intact.

Doña Ofelia (right) talks about her gardens and crops.



A major theme that FEM conveyed to me across all areas of their work is what they refer to as “ideological transformation” — the feminist lens that community members embrace as they seek to celebrate their local women and the strengths that they bring to society. For example, it takes a significant amount of agency for members of the water brigade to learn such an artisanal craft, execute hard labor, and spend time away from their families. FEM is proud to help foster the respect that women have by their peers.

FEM also continues to expand their work to meet the growing and changing needs of their community. While they already have the agroecology school up and running, in the coming years, they envision building dormitories, recreation facilities, and more educational space for girls and women of all ages. Having housing would allow more folks to access their remote location, plus, extra storage could be used for their farm equipment and harvested products.

Unfortunately, many funders have left Nicaragua due to new legal reform, and the ones that are still around have stringent funding requirements. UUSC's support is turning out to be critical at this time, and our grant is completely flexible so that our partner can direct



Fani sharing her cilantro.

resources where they are needed most — because we understand that in order to keep their more “exciting” programs running, their administration needs to stay afloat.

Thank you for helping us build this thriving relationship with such generosity. It is members like you who allow UUSC to be a solid and reliable partner for organizations through thick and thin.

Until next time,



Lindsey Hoemann

Senior Partnership Officer for
Migrant Justice

MEET OUR NEW PARTNER: THE BHRDN

UUSC is proud to introduce our newest grassroots partner, the Banaban Human Rights Defender Network (BHRDN).

Banaban people were forcibly displaced from their indigenous island of Banaba, Kiribati in 1945 due to extractive mining that destroyed their land. They relocated to Rabi, Fiji, where they are now at risk of displacement once again due to the worsening impacts of the climate crisis.

BHRDN is a community-led organization conceived in 2021 as the Rabi Island Community Hub to serve the Banaban community. They aim to ensure that the island of Rabi can remain their home. Drawing upon a strong history of adaptation and innovation, they are centering traditional knowledge, wisdom, and practices in their climate adaptation plans.

UUSC is partnering with BHRDN to help fund the immediate needs of their community — such as addressing an acute water crisis — as well as the long-term work of monitoring changes to their natural environment, creating adaptation strategies that will allow them to remain on their land, and preserving their language, history, and culture.

We are also supporting BHRDN through the process of becoming a registered NGO, and connecting them with other like-minded organizations who are experiencing similar issues of climate-forced displacement.

BHRDN is paving the way toward a sustainable, resilient, and flourishing community for their local people. We are eager to join their efforts and look forward to keeping you updated on our progress in the coming year.

“We’re thrilled to be bringing the Banaban people together to remember and honor their ancestors, to strengthen partnerships, and to share their experiences with current and future climate-displaced communities.”

– Rae Bainteiti, The BHRDN

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY!

Scan this QR code with your phone to sign up and receive inspiration to your email inbox, including UUSC programs updates, action alerts, and ways to support grassroots movements for change.



THANK YOU
FOR JOINING HANDS
IN GLOBAL SOLIDARITY
WITH UUSC!

Rights Now
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
689 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139-3302

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Providence, RI
Permit No. 1367

Front: Fundación entre Mujeres, Lindsey Hoemann
Back: Kioia Island Community Organisation